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## The Relationship between Perceived Social Support and College Persistence: Development and Validation of the College Support Scale

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT AND  
COLLEGE PERSISTENCE: DEVELOPMENT AND VALIDATION OF  
THE COLLEGE SUPPORT SCALE

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY

BY

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify a psychosocial determinant, perceived social support (PSS), in relation to the outcome variable of college persistence. This study also described the psychometric characteristics of the College Support Scale (CSS), a perceived social support inventory developed with a diverse sample of college students (N=193).

A principal components analysis with varimax rotation yielded six factors from the responses to the CSS. Internal consistency reliability estimates for the 6 subscales ranged from .82 to .98. No significant main or interaction effects were found for a multivariate analysis of variance assessing differences in PSS due to gender and ethnicity. In a simultaneous regression analysis, emotional, academic, general, roommate, financial, and intimate support accounted for nearly 15% of the variance in persistence in this sample.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Interest in the multidimensional construct of social support has persisted through the past two decades (Vaux, 1988; Sarason, Sarason, & Pierce, 1990). Through the years, numerous investigators have introduced varying definitions and conceptualizations about social support (Sandler & Barrera, 1984). These early definitions of social support have demonstrated the construct's richness and complexity, yet the definitions have lacked clarity and specificity (Cohen & McKay, 1984; Tardy, 1985; Heller & Swindle, 1983; Shumaker & Brownell, 1984). More recently, Vaux (1988), among other researchers, have proposed clearer, more specific, multidefinitonal approaches, which further define and operationalize the social support construct, versus general, static, monodefinitonal perspectives. With such clarifications of the construct, researchers have been able to develop valid social support measures by identifying and focusing on a particular aspect of social support.

Based on this assumption, this study focused on a specific type of social support; perceived social support or perceived availability of support. This study described an inventory for a specific situation in relation to a specific behavior. Perceived social support was identified in



relation to the outcome variable of college persistence. This study also described the psychometric characteristics of the College Support Scale (CSS), a perceived social support inventory that could be used with a variety of populations, but especially in relation to a diverse sample of college students and their persistence intentions.

After surveying the literature, there were preliminary issues that needed to be addressed. These issues are briefly noted in this introduction, before a more in-depth discussion is included in the literature review. To begin with, there is difficulty in how to define the multifaceted construct of social support. The term, social support, itself, is vast and has many dimensions and definitions. It is necessary that this broad social support concept be separated into component processes, link those processes to context variables, and determine the conditions for their effectiveness (Heller, Swindle, Dusenbury, 1986).

Consequently, there is a need to develop measures that assess particular aspects of social support. Heitzmann and Kaplan (1988) state that general measures of social support have been developed, yet they may be less valuable than specifically tailored techniques describing social support in specific situations and with specific behaviors. For example, Sarason, Shearin, Pierce, & Sarason (1987) have suggested that measures that focus on the respondent's perception of being loved and valued are more accurate in

assessing social support. Again, attention is directed towards conceptual and empirical clarifications of social support constructs, measures, processes, and therefore outcomes.

With broad definitions of the social support construct and the lack of consensus in the definitions of social support, it is even more important to review researchers' questions and conclusions and inspect the instruments that were used. Heitzmann and Kaplan (1988) have stressed the critical nature of valid and reliable measurements of social support. Reliability and validity are primary concerns for measurements, as stated in the Standards for educational and psychological testing (1985). Another consideration for the psychometric properties of an instrument is the correlation coefficients, which can be affected by range restriction. Previous measures have resulted in range restriction when applied to non-Anglo populations, especially those with collectivist orientations (Solberg, Choi, Titsma, and Jolly, 1994). Therefore, it is necessary to explore new measures that clarify the concept of social support, investigate its influence and outcome in given situations, and generate, if not only incite, further robust research. These goals can be reached with reliable and valid measures.

Overall, it is clear that with the broad topic of social support, it is beneficial to narrow and specify its components, its particular processes, and its impact, as

well as to attend to the psychometric qualities, conception, development, and design of the instruments used to measure social support (Heller et al., 1986; Heitzmann & Kaplan, 1988). Through the conceptual and empirical clarification of social support, psychometrically sound instruments can be developed, and processes can be illuminated. The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship and assess the impact between a psychosocial determinant (perceived social support) and the outcome variable of college persistence. There is evidence that the construct of social support, perceived availability of support, is related to college persistence (Mallinckrodt, 1988; Tinto, 1987). The overall objective was to describe the development and validation of a specific social support scale with a diverse sample of college students. In the following literature review, the breadth of social support is observed, a call for specificity in social support is reiterated, and perceived availability of social support is reviewed.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Social Support

Among the multitude of definitions and terms, it is generally accepted that social support involves some kind of transaction or relationship between individuals, yet this simple definition has been conceptualized by numerous authors in a variety of ways (Shumaker & Brownell, 1984). To add to social support's complexity, these resources provided by others in the environment can have a positive or negative effect (Cohen and Syme, 1985) or the recipient can have a different reaction or perception to the support than its intended supportive function. Because social support is conceptualized in a multitude of ways, there are also numerous definitions and terms that follow. Tardy (1985) proposed a way to clarify differences in definition and approach to social support with five main dimensions: direction (support can be given and/or received); disposition (availability of support resources versus enacted or provided resources); description of support versus evaluation of satisfaction or helpfulness of support; content (actual form of support, for example, emotional or material support); and network support (social system or systems). In

terms of the function of social support, Caplan (1974) suggested three kinds of help that social support might provide: helping an individual utilize and manage psychological resources to handle emotional problems, sharing tasks, and providing material (money, skills) or cognitive assistance (guidance). Other comprehensive support network measures specify what types of support were given, namely, emotional, financial, practical, and guidance support) (Barrera, 1981, Vaux, 1988). There is growing consensus that three categories of distinction in social support are helpful: support network resources, supportive behavior, and appraisals of support (Vaux, 1988). Vaux (1988) also classifies six modes of social support that recur in the literature: emotional, advice/guidance, feedback, practical, financial/material, and socializing.

Social support has also been defined as "perceived or actual instrumental and/or expressive provisions supplied by the community, social networks, and confiding partners" by Lin and Ensel (1984) (p.18). This definition of social support can be classified in yet another way by distinguishing between network characteristics and perceived social support. Instead of focusing on functional and structural social network connections provided by the environment, perceived social support refers to the impact or effect networks have on the individual (Heller & Swindle, 1983). Furthermore, actual versus perceived distinctions in support

have been less than clear or undifferentiated through past research, even though there are important distinctions between these two conceptualizations of support. Heller and Swindle (1983) and Procidano and Heller (1983) among other investigators have argued the value of the individual's experience and view of supportive relationships and interactions. Procidano (1984) has defined perceived social support as the extent to which an individual believes that their needs for support, information, and feedback are fulfilled. Procidano's definition adheres to Caplan's (1974) statement that support networks provide support, information, and feedback, yet still separates social network from perceived social support. Thus, the phenomena of social support is multifaceted and includes both objective and subjective components of actual actions and activities and the participant's perceptions and appraisals of these situations (Vaux, 1988).

### Perceived Social Support

It is clear that one difficulty is how to define the multidimensional construct of social support, its components, functions, and processes. One aspect of social support is perceived social support which can be described as the perception of support that can be accessed or that is available. Heller et al. (1986) referred to the perceived social support construct as a generalized appraisal developed by individuals in which they believe that others care

for and value them, that support is available to them, and that they are satisfied with these relationships. On the other hand, Shumaker and Brownell (1984) defined the social support construct as "an exchange of resources between at least two individuals perceived by the provider or the recipient to be intended to enhance the well-being of the recipient" (p.13). In comparison, not only is perceived social support a more specific psychological construct, but it also has been found to be a better predictor of psychological status than objectively measured social support (Barrera, 1981; Sarason, Sarason, Potter, & Antoni, 1984).

Wethington and Kessler (1986) support these findings. Wethington & Kessler (1986) analyzed cross-sectional data for 1,269 adult respondents to a national survey. Analyses suggest that perceived support is more important than received support in predicting adjustment to stressful life events. The stress-buffering effect of social support is more strongly linked to perceptions of support availability than the actual supportive behavior. According to Lazarus' (1966) model of the relationship between stressors and health and appraisals, the subjective experience of stress depends on two aspects of appraisal. One perception is that the event is threatening and the second perception is the evaluation of coping resources. Social support enters this appraisal process by affecting either assessment or mastery of the situation (Cohen & McKay, 1984) and stress

occurs only if the event is perceived as dangerous and coping is inadequate. Wethington and Kessler (1986) provided evidence that perceived support can have more importance over actual or received support and that psychological adjustment is promoted through perceived availability of support, despite the limitations of their cross-sectional design and measurement.

Perceived social support is also predictive of coping effectiveness, adjustment outcome, and psychological and physical well-being (Blazer, 1982; Cohen & Syme, 1985; Sandler & Barrera, 1984; Wethington & Kessler, 1986). Perceived social support measures have yielded the strongest positive associations with health outcomes (Sarason, Sarason, & Pierce, 1994; Blazer, 1982; Wethington & Kessler, 1986). Perceived availability of social support has been found to be a consistent determinant in personal adjustment (Sarason et al., 1994). (Perceived social support, as a psychological construct, is also stable over time and situation, even during periods of developmental transitions (Sarason et al., 1994; Lakey & Cassady, 1988; Lakey & Heller, 1988). Supportive social contexts facilitate adjustment and well-being when faced with a wide variety of stressors (Kessler & McLeod, 1985; Burda, Vaux, & Schill, 1984).

Demakis and McAdams (1994) found evidence that perceived availability and quality of a person's supportive networks were predictors of emotional well-being. Sixty-



three college students participated in a short-term longitudinal design and series of ANOVAs were performed. Participants who reported more perceived availability and greater satisfaction with their supportive network were less psychologically distressed and more satisfied with life. Social support was found to be predictive of subjective well-being suggesting that social support may be integral for successful integration and adaptation to college life.

Demakis and McAdams (1994) also state that other investigators, even with varying measures of social support, generally observe social support's beneficial effects on well-being and buffering effects on stress in college students. Researchers generally concur that there is justification for perceived support's benefits, even if the exact processes are still being examined (Demakis & McAdams, 1994). Thus, perceived social support is especially relevant to college persistence and adjustment, in which there are numerous stressors, changes in environment, and demands of social support (Sandler & Barrera, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1978). Yet, if an individual does not perceive the need or availability of social support, the support cannot be used (Bruhn & Phillips, 1984). That is why the perception of social support is an important specific component to study in assessing college persistence intentions. Perceived support and its perceived availability are relevant to various aspects of adjustment to college, as

cited by the previous researchers.

### Perceived Social Support and College Persistence

As a result of the numerous operationalizations of social support, the function of social support has been reviewed as well. Numerous researchers have found the value of social support across diverse subject samples, social support and distress measures, and research designs (Brown, Brady, Lent, Wolfert, & Hall, 1987; Heller et al., 1986; Levy 1983; Thoits, 1986). Social support has been related with psychological adjustment and physical health. Even though social support has been associated with both physical and mental health, and buffering effects towards stressful life events and symptoms, there is less understanding of how social ties (or one's satisfaction with them) function to protect mental health and promote psychological adjustment (Brown et al., 1987). Therefore, this study focuses specifically on one aspect of social support and its effect on a particular type of adjustment. Perceptions of social support and how they are associated with college persistence is investigated.

In this study, persistence was operationally defined in terms of intentions of persistence versus objective or outcome data. Intentions have direct effects on persistence and other measures such as institutional commitment which are transmitted through intention, according to Bean (1980). The "intention to leave or stay" is an important mediating

influence on persistence behavior (Bean, 1980). This study used persistence intentions as the outcome variable.

Other researchers have studied social factors that influence college students to persist or drop out of college. One of the most prominent theorists in student retention, Tinto (1987), postulated that a longitudinal process of interactions with an individual and the institution affects whether or not a student persists and graduates from the institution. The interaction is between the individual who has various attributes, skills, and dispositions (intentions and commitments) and the institution that has a social and academic system. The more integrated a student is in the social and academic life on campus, committed to the goal of graduation, and committed to the institution; the greater the chances that the student will persist and graduate.

It has been argued that social integration has stronger predictive power of persistence even more than academic integration (Tinto, 1987). Social support and coping literature have also documented that a supportive social context facilitates adjustment and well-being when faced with a variety of stressors (Burda et al., 1984; Kessler & McLeod, 1985). The availability of social support may facilitate the adjustment to college, persistence in college, and subsequent stressors, in contrast to the absence of support which may lead to loneliness, alienation, and deterioration in well-being, all of which negatively impact persistence

(Mallinckrodt, 1988). It is evident that an association exists between perceived social support and college persistence.

Furthermore, Cohen, Sherrod, and Clark (1986) found that students who experienced reductions in appraisal support by the end of their first semester reported higher levels of social anxiety. Psychological distress has been hypothesized to impair the development of social support (Heller & Swindle, 1983). Fleming (1984) states that a supportive environment offers opportunities for friendships and social interaction to prevent vulnerability to stress, offers social and academic integration and participation in campus life, and offers a sense of progress in the academic environment. The central issue is how and if perceived social support is related to college persistence. Obviously, social integration has a positive impact in the relationship and in the probability of increasing persistence (Tinto, 1987).

Yet, according to Pascarella and Terenzini (1978) and Terenzini and Pascarella (1977), academic integration has a strong relationship to persistence. Traditionally, academic variables, such as lack of ability or poor study habits, were related to academic success (achievement or persistence) (Pantages & Creedon, 1978). Tracey and Sedlacek (1985) proposed that other, "noncognitive," variables (such as realistic self-appraisal, availability of a strong

support person, demonstrated community service, positive self-concept, preference for long-term goals over short-term needs, understanding and ability to deal with racism and successful leadership experiences are related to persistence (academic success or achievement). It is debatable that these "noncognitive" variables are associated with and have components of social support, which in turn, affects persistence in college and the perceived availability of support. Cumulative GPA and persistence was examined over four years with 1,995 participants from 1979 and 747 from 1980. For the Caucasian students, persistence was affected by items reflecting positive self-concept. For the African American students, persistence was related to availability of a strong support person for college plans and goals, academic self-confidence, realistic self-appraisal, and academic familiarity. A support person for college plans and a preference for long-term goals was important in predicting persistence, but only until the third semester. Thus, findings differ depending on the specific aspects of the individual, institution, and support studied, but most evidence indicated positive relationships with persistence and perceived social support.

Contrary to research previously cited, Herchberger and D'Augelli (1992) conducted a path analysis of the relationship of academic performance and social support to graduation among African American and Caucasian university

students. Participants (N=161) completed a battery of measures and one measure was administered in the student's home by a trained interviewer. The researchers found that perceptions of social support and well-being between races differed, but these variables did not relate to graduation. These findings imply the complex nature of the student, institution, and their interaction and the investigator's role in discriminating among these variables in their research. The measures used in their analysis were not specifically constructed to assess support in relation to academic performance or the student's social network in relation to academic persistence. Yet, the factors studied affect a student's retention, persistence, and subsequent attrition, as can be seen by this particular sample. First-year college grade-point average, directly, and precollege academic performance, indirectly, predicted graduation in this sample. Social support was not a powerful predictor for African American student's academic success in a predominately Caucasian university.

Herchberger and D'Augelli (1992) explained these results by stating that students, especially African American students, at that university, encountered challenges of minority status, entered with lower precollege academic scores and had lower rates of graduation. The researchers proposed that students may have perceived that the university provided less support for their needs and that social

adjustment was more difficult. With the lack of perceived support from the university and subsequently the academic and social environment, less satisfaction and interference with academic success and social integration may have resulted. The lack of social support and perceived social support supports Tinto's (1975) model of college student attrition and persistence that basically stated that with other variables being equal, the greater the student's level of social and academic integration and involvement, the greater the commitment to the institution, continuation at the institution, and goal of graduation. Such commitments in conjunction with levels of integration have a positive influence on persistence (Pascarella, Duby, Iverson, 1983).

Mallinckrodt (1988) also found that social support may be an important factor in student retention. Based on 143 surveys measuring perceived social support and the results from a discriminant function analysis, persistence or non-persistence for approximately 70% of both African American and Caucasian students was predicted. Support from members from the campus community seemed to be important for African American students and support from family seemed to be important for Caucasian students. Mallinckrodt (1988) proposed that what Astin (1975) described as involvement and identification, and what Tinto (1975) described as social and academic involvement and integration, may be the development of supportive relationships in the college environ-

ment, and moreso for African American students. Faughn (1982), reported by Mallinckrodt (1988), found that persisters in relation to nonpersisters had more self-described "significant" relationships with students, faculty, or staff on campus. Therefore, student interactions and social and academic integration may be increased by the availability and perception of support, which subsequently positively helps persistence (Mallinckrodt, 1988). The purpose of this study was to examine perceived social support and its relationship with college persistence, in conjunction with describing an inventory of perceived social support.



## CHAPTER III

### METHOD

#### Participants and Procedure

Survey questionnaires were mailed to 400 second-year and third-year students attending Loyola University Chicago. Data from the College Support Scale and persistence intentions inventory were used. These measures were part of the larger, previous study. Participants were randomly selected and consisted of four racial/ethnicity groups (African American, Asian American, Caucasian, Hispanic American). Participation was confidential and voluntary. One follow-up reminder and one re-mailing of the survey was conducted in anticipation that a 50% response rate would be achieved.

After an initial and follow-up mailing, 193 usable questionnaires were returned resulting in a response rate of 48%. 146 (75.6%) were female, 46 (23.8%) were male, and 1 (.5%) did not give a response for the gender item. The ages of respondents follow: 61 (31.6%) were age 20, 59 (30.6%) were age 21, 34 (17.6%) were age 22, 10 (5.2%) were age 23, 8 (4.2%) were between ages 24-25, 8 (4.1%) were between ages 27-35, 5 (2.6%) were between 18-19, and 1 (.5%) was age 47. Of the 193 respondents, 7 (3.6%) did not give a response to the date of birth/year item. The mean was 21.5 years of age

and the median was 21 years of age with a standard deviation of 2.86.

The demographics for ethnicity are as follows. Out of 193 respondents, 60 or 31.1% were Caucasian, 48 or 24.9% were Asian American, 47 or 24.4% were Hispanic American and 38 or 19.7% were African American.

### Perceived Social Support Instrument

#### Item generation.

The assumption that perceived social support is a valid construct and that adjustment to college is complex underlies the development of the College Support Scale. The CSS is a rationally derived self-report instrument. The inventory was constructed by a team of experts that judged the items on their relevance and content by a two-thirds vote. The domain of items was based generally on the social support taxonomies found in the social support literature, and included academic, financial, and social aspects of college experience in relation to perceived support.

The scale consisted of 46 randomly ordered items that required a response to the phrase "To what extent is there someone with whom you can:". Items from each of the factor-analyzed subscales are given as examples: "Vent feelings of frustration regarding family", "Share pain" (Emotional support); "Ask for help/tutoring on specific assignments", "Ask for information regarding specific classes/instructors/professors" (Academic support); "Talk on the phone", "Laugh"

(General support); "Share living space", "Share grocery bills" (Roommate support); "Rely on for financial support (tuition, living expenses, etc.)", "Depend on to take care of you when you are sick" (Financial support); and "Ask on a date", "Care about romantically/intimately" (Intimate support). A 6-point response scale from never (1) to always (6) was used. Students were asked to circle one response. A goal was to address various aspects of perceived social support as well as to yield indices for overall perceived social support. Specific areas of academic, financial, and social distinctions of perceived support were of interest.

#### Additional Instruments

##### Persistence intentions instrument.

The scale consists of 5 items randomly ordered that requested that participants indicate their level of agreement or disagreement on a 4-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). Participants responded to 5 items about persistence intentions (e.g., "I am thinking about dropping out of college"). One item was "Getting a college degree is a high priority to me." Tracey and Sedlacek (1984) found that indicating certainty in obtaining a degree significantly predicts minority student retention.

##### Stress instrument.

The scale consists of 21 items randomly ordered that requested that participants indicate the frequency of

experience during the last month when asked an item dealing with a particular difficulty. A 4-point response scale was used, ranging from never (1) to always (4). Participants responded to 21 items about difficulty and stress associated with college experience. One item was "Difficulty handling your academic work load".

Symptomatology instrument.

The scale consists of 43 items randomly ordered that requested that participants indicate the frequency of experience during the last week when asked an item dealing with physical or psychological symptomatology. A 6-point response scale was used, ranging from never (1) to always (6). One item was "Feeling depressed."

Self-efficacy instrument.

The scale consists of 20 items randomly ordered that requested that participants indicate how confident the participant feels to complete the task in each item. A 10-point response scale was used, ranging from not at all confident (1) to very confident (4). One item was "Do well on your exams."

Perceived socioeconomic status instrument.

The scale consists of a total of 8 items that requested that the participant indicate how their family's income, status and education level compare to others in their neighborhood, community, state, and country. Four questions surveyed the participant's present or current perceptions of

family income, status, and education levels compared to other people in their respective neighborhood, community, state, and country. Four questions inquired about earlier or past ("while growing up") perceptions of family income, status, and education levels compared to other people in their respective neighborhood, community, state, and country. Participants responded on a 3-point scale of more advantages (1), equal advantages (2), and fewer advantages (3).

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### Factor Structure

Responses on the College Support Scale were subjected to a Principal Components Analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation. To satisfy Kaiser's and Thurstone's criteria (Tinsley & Tinsley, 1987), consideration of the number of factors with eigenvalues above 1.0, examination of the scree plot, evaluation of the discontinuity between factors, and attention to meaningfulness of a given solution were conducted. The scree plot was examined in considering the number of factors to rotate, according to Cattell's scree test. Kaiser's criteria of observing eigenvalues of 1.0 or more suggested extraction of six components that were retained, which accounted for 71.0% of the total variance. A value of .50 was used to cut off items that did or did not relate to a component. A total of 40 items were retained that had a value of .50 or above and 6 items were dropped from the College Support Scale.

Factor loadings from the principal components analysis are the following, (see Table 1). Factor 1 consisted of 21 items with factor loadings that ranged from .78 (Vent feelings of frustration regarding family) to .54 (Trust to help

in an emergency) and accounted for 53.6% of the estimated common variance. Analysis of the highest loading items suggested that this factor assessed various aspects of emotional support such as perceived support for sharing pain, anger, or feelings about grave topics and was titled Emotional Support. Factor 2 consisted of 5 items with factor loadings that ranged from .79 (Ask for help/tutoring on specific assignments) to .53 (Discuss problems about major or institution). This factor assessed aspects about academic-related issues and was titled Academic Support. Factor 3 consisted of 3 items with factor loadings that ranged from .66 (Talk on the phone) to .58 (Feel good about yourself) and was titled General Support. Factor 4 consisted of 4 items with factor loadings that ranged from .69 (Share living space) to .55 (Share housework) and was titled Room-mate Support. Factor 5 consisted of 4 items with factor loadings that ranged from .74 (Rely on for financial support (tuition, living expenses) to .60 (Borrow small amounts of money) and was titled Financial Support. Factor 6 consisted of 3 items with factor loadings that ranged from .80 (Ask on a date) to .54 (Celebrate holidays or special events) and was titled Intimacy Support.

TABLE 1  
FACTOR LOADING ESTIMATES OF THE SIX-FACTOR SOLUTION

Factor scale/item summary	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
<b>Factor I</b>						
42 Vent feelings of frustration regarding family	.78	.17	.23	.18	.19	.26
41 Share pain	.77	.19	.18	.15	.18	.29
22 Rely on for emotional pain	.76	.11	.28	.21	.12	.25
15 Vent feelings of frustration regarding relationships (significant others)	.75	.23	.27	.17	.18	.18
25 Discuss death of loved one	.74	.22	.09	.17	.26	.30
40 Vent frustrations regarding instructors/professors	.72	.37	.22	.28	.19	.08
31 Share information about family	.72	.12	.23	.18	.33	.34
5 Vent frustration regarding other students	.71	.28	.29	.17	.11	-.06
37 Share anger	.71	.38	.14	.20	.20	.27
14 Share secrets	.67	-.03	.46	.16	.29	.14
44 Share good/bad news	.67	.12	.33	.21	.31	.21
45 Talk about significant other (boyfriend/girlfriend)	.66	.11	.22	.17	.26	.37
43 Receive constructive criticism	.64	.28	.23	.21	.15	.33
24 Discuss your financial problems	.63	.19	.13	.16	.40	.28
39 Discuss religious identity	.62	.38	-.06	.39	.22	.05
19 Discuss excellent/poor academic performance	.61	.33	.28	.30	.20	-.05
46 Talk about issues concerning ethnicity	.58	.44	.00	.34	.15	.14
21 Vent feelings of frustration regarding employment	.57	.32	.18	.30	.14	.18
9 Trust to help in an emergency	.56	.34	.41	.27	.15	.24
6 Trust to help with important decisions	.56	.21	.41	.18	.22	.23
18 Discuss career goals	.54	.50	.30	.19	.23	.01
<b>Factor II</b>						
8 Ask for help/tutoring on specific assignments	.21	.79	.05	.06	.13	.11
7 Ask for information regarding specific classes/instructors/professors	.22	.78	.10	.19	.09	.00
16 Gain information about educational funding	.06	.69	.18	.09	.15	.22
4 Explore different cultural experiences	.36	.60	.06	.35	-.07	.23
3 Discuss problems about major or institution	.44	.53	.35	.02	.27	.12
<b>Factor III</b>						
13 Talk on the phone	.42	.15	.66	.08	.20	.19
2 Laugh	.36	.18	.64	.12	.08	.17
12 Feel good about yourself	.38	.20	.58	.14	.12	.44
<b>Factor IV</b>						
32 Share living space	.37	.20	.10	.69	.20	.22
29 Share grocery bills	.23	.16	.11	.68	.32	.29
10 Share housing	.46	.24	.25	.62	.03	.03
35 Share housework (cleaning, taking out the trash, etc.)	.24	.07	.06	.55	.54	-.05
<b>Factor V</b>						
34 Rely on for financial support (tuition, living expenses, etc.)	.20	.09	.18	.15	.74	.03
36 Depend on to take care of you when you are sick	.40	.25	-.10	.10	.66	.15
1 Borrow large amounts of money (over \$100)	.15	.20	.27	.11	.65	.21
38 Borrow small amounts of money	.47	.14	.17	.18	.60	.17
<b>Factor VI</b>						
26 Ask on a date	.26	.21	.20	.16	.11	.80
30 Care about romantically/intimately	.40	.08	.13	.08	.12	.77
27 Celebrate holidays (special events)	.50	.10	.27	.31	.22	.54



Scale intercorrelations.

Subscale intercorrelations ranged from .46 to .78. The intercorrelations are lower than their internal consistency estimates, suggesting that the subscales contain a notable amount of unique reliable variance. The correlation matrix with intercorrelations, means, and standard deviations of the subscales are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2  
INTERCORRELATIONS, MEANS, AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF THE  
COLLEGE SUPPORT SCALE SUBSCALES

Subscale	1	2	3	4	5	6	Mean	SD
Emotional	-	.68	.78	.73	.66	.71	4.43	1.25
Academic		-	.55	.53	.46	.46	3.90	1.12
General			-	.55	.52	.65	4.91	1.04
Roommate				-	.59	.54	4.05	1.48
Financial					-	.50	4.35	1.32
Intimate						-	4.15	1.59

All correlation coefficients,  $p < .01$ .

### Reliability

Internal consistency reliability was estimated using Cronbach's coefficient alpha for the College Support Scale. The internal consistency reliability for the total scale was estimated to be .98. The six subscales display good internal consistency estimates, ranging from .82 to .98. The reliability estimates of the perceived support subscales are the following: Emotional Support, .98; Academic Support, .85; General Support, .82; Roommate Support, .85; Financial Support, .82; and Intimate Support, .89.

### Validity

Another principal components analysis with varimax rotation was conducted with the CSS and additional scales (see Table 3). These other scales assessed symptomatology, stress, efficacy, persistence, and socioeconomic status.

Factor 1 consisted of the perceived support scale, efficacy scale, and persistence scale. Factor 2 consisted of the symptomatology and stress scale and Factor 3 consisted of the perceived socioeconomic scale (see Table 4). Consistent with Tinto's theory, social support was found to be associated with social adjustment factors. Other personal adjustment factors were not related to perceived social support. The pattern of findings suggested that the perceived social support scale was related and converged with self-efficacy and persistence intentions, and discriminated from stress, symptomatology, and socioeconomic status.

TABLE 3  
CORRELATION MATRIX OF THE COLLEGE SUPPORT SCALE (CSS)  
AND SELECTED VARIABLES

---

Scale	1	2	3	4	5	6
CSS	-	.54**	-.27**	-.21**	.20**	.34**
Efficacy		-	-.47**	-.39**	.16*	.26**
Stress			-	.63**	-.10	-.25**
Symptom				-	-.03	-.30*
Perceived SES					-	.14*
Persistence						-

---

\*p<.05.    \*\*p<.01.

TABLE 4  
 FACTOR LOADINGS FROM THE PRINCIPAL COMPONENTS ANALYSIS OF  
 THE CORRELATION MATRIX OF THE COLLEGE SUPPORT SCALE AND  
 OTHER VARIABLES

Scale	1	2	3
College Support	.90	.03	.06
Efficacy	.72	-.38	.04
Persistence	.58	-.19	.13
Symptom	-.17	.89	.00
Stress	-.23	.86	-.06
Perceived SES	.13	-.03	.99

Regression analysis.

A simultaneous multiple regression analysis was used to assess the relationship between the social support subscales and college persistence. The results of the simultaneous regression indicate that when entered into the regression in a single step, emotional, academic, general, roommate, financial, and intimate support accounted for a total  $R^2$

contribution of .149. This suggests that the combination of these six variables account for approximately 15% of the variance in persistence among the subjects in this sample. Examination of the beta weights indicate that the only significant predictor was emotional support  $B=.43$ ,  $T(6, 186)=2.68$ ,  $p<.05$ . The contribution of intimate, academic, financial, roommate, and general support was negligible.

#### Gender, Ethnicity and Perceived Social Support

In order to establish whether there were differences in perceived social support ratings due to gender or ethnicity, a 2 (gender) x 4 (ethnicity) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed with six social support subscales serving as dependent variables. No significant main or interaction effects were found (see Table 5). The College Support Scale did not seem to be sensitive to gender or ethnicity differences for this sample.

TABLE 5

MULTIVARIATE AND UNIVARIATE ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE FOR THE  
COLLEGE SUPPORT SCALE AND GENDER AND ETHNICITY

	UNIVARIATE		F prob	MULTIVARIATE	
	SS	F ratio		Wilks Lambda	F prob
Gender x Ethnicity				.62	.593
Emotsup	2.111	.488	.691		
Acadsup	3.201	.869	.458		
Gensup	.465	.151	.929		
Rmatsup	9.859	1.568	.199		
Finsup	2.057	.402	.751		
Intsup	9.881	1.408	.242		
Gender				.62	.135
Emotsup	12.145	8.419	.004**		
Acadsup	2.472	2.014	.158		
Gensup	5.351	5.212	.024*		
Rmatsup	6.160	2.940	.088		
Finsup	2.343	1.375	.242		
Intsup	7.628	3.261	.070		
Ethnicity				.80	.229
Emotsup	6.319	1.460	.227		
Acadsup	3.321	.902	.441		
Gensup	3.052	.991	.398		
Rmatsup	8.407	1.337	.264		
Finsup	1.725	.337	.798		
Intsup	20.495	2.921	.035*		

\*p&lt;.05. \*\*p&lt;.01.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

This researcher endeavored to describe an inventory for a specific situation in relation to a specific behavior. One foundation for the development of a scale of social support was the call for specificity and clarity of social support constructs and their measures in the literature (Heitzmann & Kaplan, 1988; Heller & Swindle, 1983). In addition, reliable, valid, and specific measures of social support are important (Heitzmann & Kaplan, 1988). A perceived social support inventory, the College Support Scale (CSS), was designed to assess a diverse sample of college students and their persistence intentions. This study described the psychometric characteristics of the College Support Scale (CSS) and the development and validation of the CSS was reported as well.

#### Summary and Discussion of Results

The factor analysis provided a conceptual organization of the identified six components (emotional, academic, general, roommate, financial and intimate categories of appraisal support) perceived to be available from the respondent's network. A six-factor solution appears to be empirically justified and theoretically meaningful for the

### College Support Scale.

The College Support Scale assesses perceptions of six components of support, which theoretically follow Caplan's (1974) definition of support as well as other definitions of the construct. Caplan (1974) defines support as helping an individual utilize and manage psychological resources to handle emotional problems, share tasks, and provide material (money, skills) or cognitive assistance (guidance) (Vaux, 1988). The purposes and intended uses of the College Support Scale seem to be valid, in that the inventory seems to be measuring what it was developed to measure. The uses of the inventory can be studied in more detailed research and extended to different samples. Furthermore, it was of interest to find that the College Support Scale initially converged with social adjustment criteria and discriminated from personal adjustment factors.

The internal consistency reliability of this homogenous scale, the College Support Scale, is estimated to be good, which decreases the effects of low reliability on correlations between social support and outcome variables. Observed correlations are more likely to be decreased when a variable is measured with error. The regression analysis showed that emotional, academic, general, roommate, financial, and intimate support accounted for approximately 15% of the variance in persistence among the participants in this sample. 85% of the variance of persistence is accounted for by other



variables and not perceived social support.

This study did not find differences in gender or ethnicity in this sample, according to the MANOVA, which means that this inventory was not sensitive to these differences with this sample, although differences may exist. Further research designs can inquire about various groups at risk that need to be identified for lack of social support or perceptions about the availability of support.

### Limitations

As a result of the correlational research method that was employed in this study, causal statements cannot be made. This is an inherent limitation of the correlational research design. Another constraint is that the data were gathered at a medium-sized urban university in the midwest with many students living off-campus with their families and commuting to the university. Although the sample was an ethnically diverse sample, the data may produce results that may not generalize to more traditional universities (where most of the students live on-campus).

### Applications for the Field

Practical implications and future research may draw more attention to perceived social support, its impact, and its subsequent effects upon college persistence. With further research, there is room for exploring ideas about workshops, interventions, and programming concerning perceptions of social support, especially in relation to persistence.

Schools and counseling centers could implement helpful prevention and intervention strategies to increase perceptions of social support and subsequent persistence rates. The results of this study provide initial findings for a relationship between perceived social support and persistence, but further investigations are necessary, in order to activate effective interventions.

#### Implications for Future Research

Further research on the dynamics and processes of perceived social support with emphasis on the impact to college persistence is necessary. Clearly, additional reliability and validity studies of the College Support Scale are needed. Such research could lead to a better understanding of the multidimensional and multifaceted construct of social support as well as the specific and valuable construct of perceived social support. Future research can focus on better operationalizations of components of social support and how these components vary depending on social, individual, and environmental contexts.

## APPENDIX

## PERMISSION LETTER

Marilyn T. Verde  
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V. Scott Solberg  
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September 1, 1995

Dear Dr. Solberg,

I am completing a thesis at Loyola University Chicago entitled "The Relationship Between Perceived Social Support and College Persistence: Development and Validation of the College Support Scale." I would like your permission to reprint in my thesis excerpts from inventories in the College Experience Survey and from the symposium presented at the 102nd Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association. The excerpts to be reprinted are the College Support Scale in its entirety and items and references from the measures of the College Experience Survey. The requested permission extends to any future revisions and editions of my thesis, including non-exclusive world rights in all languages, and to the prospective publication of my thesis by University Microfilms, Inc. These rights will in no way restrict republication of the material in any other form by you or by others authorized by you. Your signing of this letter will also confirm that you own the copyright to the above-described material.

If these arrangements meet with your approval, please sign this letter where indicated. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

*Marilyn T. Verde*

Marilyn T. Verde

PERMISSION GRANTED FOR THE USE OF REQUESTED ABOVE:

*V. Scott Solberg*  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 V. Scott Solberg

*11/1/95*  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date

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## VITA

The author, Marilyn T. Verde, was born in LaPorte, Indiana and was raised in Crown Point, Indiana. In September 1988, Miss Verde entered Indiana University-Bloomington, receiving the degree of Bachelor of Arts in psychology in August, 1992. While attending Indiana University, she was president of Psi Chi and elected a member of Mortar Board. She was accepted to Loyola University Chicago in 1993 in the Department of Counseling Psychology. While pursuing a Master of Arts degree, she was a commuter advisor for the Department of Student Life and completed her practicum in Counseling and Developmental Services with the Learning Assistance Center at Loyola University Chicago.

APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Marilyn T. Verde has been read and approved by the following committee:

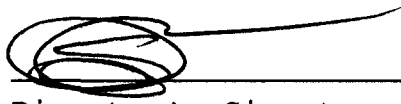
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The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the thesis is now given final approval by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Community Counseling program in the Department of Counseling Psychology.

11/30/85  
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Director's Signature